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## Washington State Senate

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Phil Anderson, Director  
Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife  
600 Capitol Way North  
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Director Anderson,

Thank you for taking the time to send me an update on the situation with the Wedge Wolf Pack. I appreciate the effort your department is putting into this issue. I too am supportive of the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan and believe it provides an excellent framework for managing our increasing wolf population.

I am attentive to the heightening level of public concern regarding the Department's recent actions. I believe that legitimate questions are being asked of the Department by conservation organizations such as Conservation Northwest and Defenders of Wildlife. To ensure that public support for the Department and the Plan continue, any actions to address wolf/livestock interactions need to be well-documented and transparent.

It is my understanding that one of the biggest concerns being raised by these groups is the lack of clear and conclusive evidence that wolves were responsible for the incidents you cite in your timeline. As documented in your internal depredation reports, some of the outside experts that the Department consulted concluded that recent attacks were uncharacteristic of wolf depredation. Here are some particular troubling quotes from the reports:

*"The only predation possibility this expert could envision is a single, unconfident wolf but believed that to be a stretch. This expert stated it did not look consistent with wolf predation, or coyote predation either (the calf is too large or he has never seen that occur)" - August 14th*

*"Another expert from Idaho stated that the apparent injuries to the calf appeared superficial and that if a wolf killed it, the wolf would have had more gums than teeth. That the calf was discovered laying on its left side where most of the "bruises" were found suggested more blood pooling than significant mechanical injury from wolf bites. Wolves typically inflict multiple bites and repeatedly tear out tissue from their prey to the point where the prey animal is unable to continue fleeing or even stand up any longer until it ultimately succumbs to the injury and trauma. This expert encouraged that the WDFW have a veterinarian do a follow-up necropsy including inside the body cavity of the calf." - August 16<sup>th</sup>*

I feel that the views of the experts regarding the cause of the livestock deaths are very important. The apparent variance of views from outside experts should raise the threshold for staff determinations. While

I admire the knowledge and capabilities of the Department's field specialists, they are new to the task of determining wolf depredations.

Perhaps your field staff could be given more discretion to leave the cause of attack unknown when questions remain? In a case such as this, when the rancher is refusing compensation - an important tool provided for in the Plan - the only purpose of the determination is to guide wolf removal. Decision space needs to be provided accordingly. When it comes to the serious action of lethally removing state-endangered wolves, straying from the Plan's very specific intent will only heighten controversy and ultimately delay wolf recovery and delisting. In this case, the Plan states that lethal control will be used only when "livestock have clearly been killed by wolves."

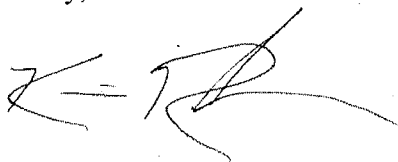
Another important criterion to be met before lethal removal is that documented non-lethal methods have been tried and failed. I respect and value the steps that the local rancher apparently has taken to reduce wolf/livestock conflicts on their ranch and public land allotment. But it's not clear that other fundamental steps were taken. As per the Plan:

- Were dead calves immediately removed from the allotment to avoid attracting predators?
- What level of coordination has been occurring with the US Forest Service to help the rancher/permittee keep their cattle out of harm's way?
- What kind of training and direction were the ranch hands offered by the Department to help reduce the risk of conflict? Simply noting that the rancher has five hired hands seems to be a very low threshold for switching to lethal options.

The order to kill up to four wolves at this point, in addition to the one already eliminated, might seem overly aggressive even if the above questions were not lingering. With the questions, and with the recent discovery that the ear-tagged pup is dead from unknown cause, your standing kill order strikes me as ill-advised and an over-reaction, especially at this early stage of recovery.

I am committed to working with the Department and others to identify solutions to resolve these conflicts in the future, and I look forward to further discussion and the information requested above. It is critical that this first real test of the Plan is a successful model for how to deal with future wolf/livestock conflicts.

Sincerely,



Senator Kevin Ranker

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